■ ■ ■ Chapter 1

Teacher professionalism, development and research

■ ■ ■ Why are we writing this book?

We are interested in practitioner research because we engage in it ourselves and we work with teachers and teacher educators who are steeped in it. We also come from a generation of teachers who started their careers when it was mostly teachers themselves who decided what they taught, how they taught it and why they taught it that way. It is easy to romanticize and, of course, there were examination syllabi to follow and agreed protocols to guide us. We enjoyed the freedom, though, to develop from scratch an integrated humanities scheme of work for lower school (Key Stage 3) pupils; to set and mark our own mode 3 Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations; to experiment with completely integrated days for 11–14-year-olds and to grow sociology from a one teacher subject to a whole department teaching 350 pupils annually. We wrestled with the philosophical basis of the 'core' curriculum, argued about the purpose and value of mixed ability groupings and had debates on teaching style with Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) inspectors. OK, enough reminiscing!

   We found those exciting times but now, with the great advances in our understanding of how people learn, the availability of fantastic learning technologies, the ubiquity of more varied and stimulating teaching strategies, the development of cross-curricular teaching projects and the welcome return of an emphasis on creativity in the curriculum, we are seeing that excitement rekindled and magnified. In recent years interest in practitioner teacher research has accelerated across the world and, with the shrinking of distances via electronic communication, the glob-

alization of teaching strategies and research methodologies is common-place. Communities of like-minded practitioners can share their experiences and extend their understanding in international as well as very local contexts. So we are writing this book because we are excited about the potential of practitioner research to make a vital contribution to the collective, collaborative endeavour of enquiring about and improving teaching and learning practices. We are writing it as teachers, with teachers and for teachers, whether they are in training, beginning their careers or established crafts people.

■ ■ ■ What does this book do?

In setting out to write this book on practitioner research we were faced with an initial dilemma. It is our contention that practitioner research and professional development are heavily interrelated so it is difficult to know where to start, since in considering one aspect first, some knowl-edge of the rest has to be assumed. We have imposed a form of order by considering the theoretical underpinnings of practitioner research in the early chapters, and dealing with the practical aspects of research in the remainder of the book. This is an organizational device and not a privi-leging of theory over practice.

In Chapter 2 we discuss current conceptions of educational research. The UK government would like to promote research that is directly applicable to practice that identifies the 'best' approach so that teachers, who are now encouraged to consider empirical evidence, can implement it. The promotion of practitioner research now takes this process a stage further by encouraging teachers themselves to become the researchers into their practice. This is certainly a positive development; however, the version of classroom that it promotes remains rather narrow. This is, of course, not the only interpretation of practitioner research. It can also be conceptualized as a process whereby teachers are looking critically not only at their own practice but at broader educational questions. In this version of practitioner research a greater understanding of the complex-ity of education, and a realization of how uncertain the whole education project is, assumes ascendancy. The paradigms that underpin the research process, along with a consideration of some fundamental research concepts, are also discussed in this chapter. A penchant for the

positivist paradigm tends to characterize government-sponsored practitioner research. This is perhaps due to a rather instrumentalist view that assumes only one approach to research, overwhelmingly quantitative in nature, will lead to the discovery of the 'correct' results. However, in beginning their research projects the limitations of this single paradigm approach becomes apparent to many practitioners.

Chapter 3 considers the growth of the teacher research movement through action research. This is seen as an enlightened research-based approach to teaching. Action research tends not to be universally embraced in 'official' versions of practitioner research, perhaps because of its stress on a broad approach to teacher development. Ultimately, the development of the current practitioner research movement will depend upon how effectively teachers are able to articulate the research process and how much autonomy they have in steering their own professional interests. Three case studies of best practice researchers and their movement towards different research approaches from those originally envisaged are used to illustrate these points in Chapter 4.

The remaining chapters examine the practicalities of designing a research project, accessing and reviewing literature and gathering and analysing data. Our approach is to describe and explain these processes through practical, real-life examples of research undertaken by teacher practitioners. We are proposing that practitioner research should form part of a reflexive approach to teaching and lead to a greater awareness of the complexity of the education process.

We have been privileged to work with people who have generously allowed us to extract from and comment upon their studies to illustrate in a practical way how and why teacher research can be tackled. We hope the book demonstrates how small-scale research projects might be tackled and whets readers' appetites to consult more authoritative research texts if they wish to develop a deeper engagement with the principles, processes and problematics of research. The suggested readings and reference list provide a good starting point and attempting some of the tasks at the end of each chapter may help the juices to flow!

We turn now to two discussions that will set the context for the remainder of the book. In the 1980s and 1990s there have been fierce debates about the nature and value of educational research and about the changing nature of teacher professionalism.

■ ■ ■ A crisis in educational research

Academic research in education has been criticized for a number of reasons in recent years. In the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) Annual Lecture of 1996, David Hargreaves, an influential UK educationalist, highlighted what he saw as the failure of educational research to serve those working in education. He called for teaching to become a research-based profession similar to medicine. He suggested that teachers at that time made little use of research evidence to inform their practice, through no fault of their own but because researchers were not producing findings that supported practice. Hargreaves (1996) suggested that current educational research was poor value for money and that it inadequately served the teaching profession. He called for the setting up of a National Education Research Forum 'which would shape the agenda of educational research and its policy implications and applications' (1996: 6). He also suggested that funding should be redirected from academic researchers to agencies committed to evidence-based practice and to fund teachers as researcher practitioners. This speech, whilst promoting heated debate amongst both academics and professionals concerned with education, was a forerunner of the TTA policy that promoted practitioner research (TTA, 1996) and an initial pilot project encouraging teachers to conduct their own practice-based research. The work of one of three TTA-funded projects from this time is outlined in McNamara (2002). The book shows how the researchers had to engage in a process of discussion and negotiation with their funders to reach a mutually agreeable position on a number of issues of ideological difference. McNamara and Rogers (2002) explained that the TTA moved from being sponsors to partners in the research process.

Both the Tooley Report (Tooley and Darby, 1998) funded by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), and the Hillage Report (Hillage et al., 1998) funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), also raised questions concerning the quality and usefulness of educational research. Hammersley (2002) and Elliott (2001) argue that these criticisms, Hargreaves's in particular, all take a rather simplistic view of how research is able to inform practice. They assume that causal relationships can be revealed by research and that findings can be easily applied to all schools. This would mean that variables can be identified and allowed for, ignoring

the complexity of what actually happens in classroom situations. Both Hammersley and Elliott maintain that what is essentially a positivist approach suitable for medical research is inappropriate in educational investigations. They also suggest that there is a values dimension to education that a natural scientific methodology looking for absolute answers fails to recognize. Elliott suggests that acquiring the questioning approach of a researcher is an essential part of teacher development. We should treat the whole research process as problematic with teachers taking a more interpretivist approach to classroom research rather than the positivist one which was inferred from Hargreaves's speech.

If, as Hammersley (2002) and others argue, there are different forms of research that are carried out for different purposes, it could be claimed that their outcomes should be evaluated differently because they offer complementary strengths and weaknesses. However, there is a danger that this could exacerbate the 'hierarchy' of research outputs that already exists. Greenbank (2003) points to how policy-makers, such as the former Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, hold quantitative research in higher esteem simply because of the way it is presented and to the assumption by the former Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead, of qualitative research as 'woolly and simplistic' and a 'massive waste of taxpayers' money' (cited by Wellington, 2000: 167). There also exists a hierarchy in terms of where educational research is disseminated. 'Academic' peer-reviewed education journals of national or international repute do not publish professionally oriented research – this finds expression through professional publications, conferences and in-service courses. Since Hargreaves (1996) questioned the relevance of 'academic' educational research to teachers, the complexity of the debate has been revealed, imbued as it is with political tensions around research funding policies and the hijacking of so-called professional, accessible research in pursuit of the ill-defined populist agenda of raising standards. In an article describing the work of a community of teacher researchers in Denbigh, Evans et al. (2000) are scathing about the difficulties of getting teacher research published in academic journals and books that purport to talk with authority on schools, education and teaching and learning processes. Notwithstanding the differences in emphases of different types of research, there is every reason and every need, in our view, to assign parity of status to 'professional' and 'academic' research since practitioner research must be every bit as rigorous and is almost certainly at least as relevant.

■ ■ ■ Teachers as professionals

In embarking on any project it is important to set a context and try to develop some shared meanings. Thus, because we take the view that teacher practitioner research is inextricably linked with professional development, we will spend the remainder of this chapter considering the nature of teachers' work and the political context in which the term 'professional' is applied to them. Recent political developments within education are germane here since these have directly influenced current notions of teacher professionalism, teacher development and teacher research.

There is currently great emphasis on the continuing professional development of teachers. However it is important to distinguish between a narrow, technicist, or 'technical rational' (Habermas, 1974) view of teacher development and a broad approach that is more likely to lead to significant educational improvements. The raising of educational standards has been linked, in part, to the performance of teachers and has resulted in the UK in changes to the structure and funding for professional development. The government approach, as in many other parts of the world, tends to be largely instrumentalist, viewing education as a product to be used in social and economic development and teaching as imparting the proscribed curriculum to pupils. The most effective teaching methods can be identified and then applied. From this perspective teaching is very much a technical activity and so the means of researching it tend also to be conceived of as technical or mechanistic.

The role of the teacher is, however, very complex, embracing a multitude of skills (Squires, 1999; Sugrue and Day, 2002). What constitutes 'good' teaching is still very much open to debate and depends very much on particular circumstances (see Bartlett et al., 2001, for a discussion of this). Some people may argue that teaching involves a transfer of knowledge to pupils. Others may emphasize the teacher's role in facilitating learning. What is learned and how it is learned depends upon a range of factors, from the teacher's pedagogic beliefs to the syllabus being followed. For instance, infrequently facts are required to be reproduced verbatim so they may be learned by rote. For other knowledge pupils may conduct experiments or apply ideas to new problems. Developing certain skills will probably be done through practice and repetition. Thus 'lessons' can take many forms depending upon the professional judgements of the teacher (Burton, 2001; Hayes, 2000). However, education

involves much more than the development of knowledge and skills. It has a very important moral and social dimension, in which teachers care for the pupils' welfare and foster the values of mutual respect and tolerance required in a democratic society.

The term 'profession' is frequently applied to the work of teachers but what does this actually mean and to what extent can teachers be regarded as professionals? Becker (1962) saw professionalism as merely a symbol for an ideology used to justify actions and behaviours, with many occupations using the symbol in an attempt to increase their autonomy and prestige. Many researchers have attempted to identify the features of a profession. Bottery (1996) suggested that at least 17 different criteria have been claimed at one time or another to describe professional behaviour. Salient characteristics included subscription to an exclusive, specialized body of knowledge partly learned in higher education, a code of professional conduct and ethics with a strong emphasis on service and a high degree of self-regulation by the professional body itself over entry, qualifications, training and members' conduct.

Looking at the past 50 years we could probably say that the teaching force embodied a number of these characteristics until the end of the 1970s. Teaching was seen as a worthwhile occupation and teachers were generally well respected within communities. As workers, teachers had enviable autonomy and independence but this was to alter radically through the 1980s and 1990s. Concern with 'standards' of learning led to 'The Great Debate' inspired by Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976. On gaining power in 1979 the Conservatives embarked on a radical programme of educational change predicated on free-market principles of greater parental choice and institutional autonomy. Coupled with this, paradoxically, was greater emphasis on public accountability and centralized curricular control. Policy changes such as the introduction of increasingly prescriptive curricula, publicly available school inspection reports, the publishing of pupil performance in league tables and the encouragement of bureaucratic management systems served to regulate the autonomy of teachers. Throughout the Conservative administrations of the 1980s and 1990s teachers' ability to control the pace, content, volume and assessment of their work declined (Ozga and Lawn, 1988). Routine administrative tasks grew in number. Schools' managements became more supervisory and concerned with performance levels, in keeping with their industrial counterparts. Teaching posts became less

secure with redundancy, redeployment and retraining issues attacking the professional identity of teachers.

Describing professionals such as teachers prior to these policy changes Schön (1983) said the modern professional constantly questioned and reflected upon practice. This approach involved evaluation, criticism and, ultimately, self-development and required openness and trust between collaborating practitioners. Teachers were free to develop and trial critical and innovative approaches in their teaching. However, these high levels of autonomy did not sit easily with the managerialist forms of control that derived from Conservative free-market policies in the 1980s. School managers began to prize uniformity and predictability in their quest for the higher standards demanded by the government.

In analysing teacher professionalism, Hoyle (1980) differentiated broadly between 'restricted' and 'extended' professionals. The former could be described as conscientious practitioners who work hard, prepare their lessons and care about their pupils. However, they are limited in outlook, failing to think beyond their classroom or school. They do not consider the broader purposes of education as relevant to them. Extended professionals constantly question and try to link theory to practice, seeking to improve by learning from other teachers and engaging in professional development activities. In this way they are continually developing as teachers and placing their classroom work in a wider educational context. Hoyle argued that extended professionals show, in their search for fulfilment, greater potential. He advocated that this model of professionalism should be the aim of all teachers.

However, in a context where education was increasingly being seen as a commodity in the marketplace, forms of industrial management came to be considered applicable to schools. Management cultures emphasizing cost-effectiveness, efficiency and competition competed with professional cultures, which prioritize the development of the individual pupil, social relationships and collegiality. As managerialism became more salient, the notion of 'senior management' as distinguished from 'middle management' arose (Grace, 1995) and teachers became differentiated into a clearer hierarchy. Ozga (1995) suggested that the growth of management teams and supervisory functions may have 'extended' the professionalism of some but deskilled others. By this time teachers were uniformly experiencing increasing workload, progressive loss of control over their work and greater accountability to managerial forms of control.

Within education Hoyle (1995) observed that the meaning and use of the term 'professionalism' had altered. The focus was now in, and not beyond, the classroom. It had come to mean a form of management-assured quality delivery. Dale (1989) noted that teachers had moved from licensed autonomy, trusted by the state and allowed relative independence, to a more regulated autonomy, subject to greater external monitoring. Ozga (1995; 2000) characterized teachers as bureaucratized, state professionals. The state had effectively retained strategic control of teaching, the curriculum and assessment while, under the guise of empowerment and collegiality, teachers were subject to increasing monitoring and surveillance.

■ ■ ■ The 'new professionalism'

Labour's tenure has heralded little real policy change in education since the party came to power in 1997 with modernizing education as a central plank of their political agenda. An emphasis on partnership to raise standards, some increased funding for education and a new strategy for teacher professional development have been Labour's bargaining chips for securing teachers' flexibility and co-operation in the modernizing of the profession and raising of standards (see DfEE, 1997; 1998; DfES, 2001). However, apart from different spending priorities, most of the Conservative reforms have been left in place (Docking, 2000). Given the shortage of teachers, especially in key subject areas, and the importance of the teaching force in delivering Labour's reforms, there have been attempts to improve the public image and status of these 'new professionals' through, for example, such initiatives as the establishment of the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), the creation of a National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the awarding of knighthoods for chosen headteachers (McCulloch, 2001). In Scotland the McCrone Report was set up in 1999 to address similar concerns, with an emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) as a means of ensuring a committed, flexible teaching force.

A major review of teacher professional development in England and Wales was launched in 2000, which sought to 'transform educational standards and raise achievement in every school' (DfEE, 2000a: 3). It was predicated on 10 principles: these included a need for teachers to take

ownership of their development, to 'learn on the job' from expert prac-
titioners, to harness the potential of information and communication
technology (ICT) and to plan and evaluate their development pro-
grammes. The government pledged a commitment to fund and support
teachers' professional development through a culture of entitlement.
The training of senior and middle managers for schools through NCSL
bespoke programmes is now threatening to replace the traditional
master's degree qualification that aspiring school leaders formerly under-
took. Thus training and teacher development now takes place
increasingly within a tightly managed school environment rather than
as part of higher education. The professional development of serving
teachers has become far more practical and focused and there is less
opportunity for teachers to extend their broader thinking as education-
alists. The current emphasis for teacher development is on training as
opposed to education, and inspections of the quality of this training
scrutinize closely its impact on pupil progress (OFSTED, 2002). Funda-
mentally the goal is to raise standards of pupil achievement and the
emphasis is on the techniques of teaching. Patrick et al. (2003) explain
that a similar approach had been taken in Scotland; they contend that
the type and quality of CPD provided to teachers depends on whether
policy-makers are seeking to extend professional autonomy and practice
or to enhance performativity. In both countries at present the focus
appears to be on the latter goal.

A focus on teaching techniques has been encouraged by the vogue for
developing 'evidence-based practice' (see TTA, 1996). This can be inter-
preted as doing what has been shown to work and ignoring different
ideological approaches to teaching. Whilst desirable in aiming to
improve the craft of teaching, this approach is narrowly focused (Bottery
and Wright, 1999). There is little scope for reflection beyond the class-
room and for wider pedagogical debate and it remains a
technical–rational approach to teaching, consistent in ideology with the
heavily prescriptive performance management system introduced pro-
gressively since 2000 to plan and deliver targets at school, subject and
pupil levels (see Bartlett and Burton, 2003). A key feature of this system
is the monitoring of pupil results, which is controversial in its assump-
tion of a simplistic causal relationship between teacher input and pupil
attainment. In Hoyle's terms (1995) it encourages restricted rather than
extended professionalism. Changing conceptions of the nature of

teacher professionalism can be found extensively across the world; in each case the driver for change seems to be a political will for more super-ficially measurable outcomes (see Patrick et al., 2003, for more detail).

Essentially then, we have a context where the terms 'teacher profes-sionalism' and 'teacher professional development' are used liberally but understood differently by the various stakeholder groups, including government agencies, policy-makers, teachers, teacher educators, school leaders and researchers. Whitty (1999: 2) suggests that it is best to see such alternative conceptions or models of teacher professionalism exist-ing as competing versions rather than 'seeing any one as fitting an essentialist definition ... and others as detracting from it'. Individuals will support different versions as they are influenced by their political beliefs, values and position in relation to government reforms. Stronach et al. (2002) criticize the reductive typologies and characterizations of professionalism that can be seen, for example, in the HayMcBer report (available at www.dfee.gov.uk/teachingreforms/mcber), and argue for an account of professional identities that recognizes 'the local, situated and indeterminable nature of professional practice, and the inescapable dimensions of trust, diversity and creativity' (2002: 119). This captures very well the complexity of teachers' work and the fundamental nature of teachers developing professionally within their working environ-ments in collaboration with colleagues. Practitioner enquiry is an extremely effective means of pursuing and supporting this professional development.

■ ■ ■ Task: Analysing the purpose of practitioner research

Read *Schools Achieving Success* (DFES, 2001).
Analyse:

1. How the work of teachers as professionals is portrayed here and what it involves.
2. The purpose of practitioner research as outlined in this docu-ment?

■ ■ ■ **Suggested further reading**

Craft, A. (2000) *Continuing Professional Development: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Schools.* 2nd edn. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

The author considers principles and models of the professional development of teachers. She investigates the planning and evaluation of both school and individual teacher development and as such this book will prove relevant and very interesting to the practitioner researcher.

Whitty, G. (2002) *Making Sense of Education Policy.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

This book considers education policy throughout the 1990s. It outlines curriculum innovation, teacher professionalism and school improvement. Whitty evaluates Labour education policy in terms of its fostering of social justice and inclusion. Though challenging, this is an interesting book for those working in education who are seeking a political overview.